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"CUPID CAPTIVE"

BY BOUGUEREAU

(See page 134)

A STANDARD OF ART MEASUREMENT

PART IV

DRAWING

By F. WELLINGTON RUCKSTUHL

THE fourth most important element of Art power is—Drawing. This may appear a contradiction, but it is not.

Whenever a charlatan in the world of art wishes to adopt some fresh "pose" or "put over" on the public some new and weird "ism" for the sake of exploiting the public to make money, he will choose some element of art and say that it is the cornerstone and foundation of all art and beat the big bass drum to advertise it into acceptance by the weak-minded. One will say that color is more important than drawing; another that the showing of the blue undertone in shadows or "broken color" is the most vital; another that the "deformation of the form" is the essential thing. One will say "interpretation" is the main thing; another that imitation is all that there is to art.

The question whether, in the presentation in any work of art of objects in nature, the artist should imitate, represent or interpret, is childish. For he should do neither of these exclusively and do all of them *inclusively*.

We cannot represent or express anything without more or less imitating the form of the thing represented or expressed. The question is—how *closely* should we imitate? The answer is: Closely enough to show that the man or animal or tree represented is a living man, animal or tree. In other words—in the presentation of a tramp or a king we must use as much *imitation, representation and interpretation* as is necessary to adequately express the idea and essential character of a living tramp or king. To do this—in a manner that will appeal to normal mankind across the centuries,—we should perhaps need about 95 per cent. imitation, 3 per cent. representation and 2 per cent. interpretation.

I care nothing for your charlatanistic "interpretation" of a tree. When you show me a picture of a tree and tell me that it represents an oak tree, before buying it, I want to feel that it is an oak tree and not any old kind of a tree. And when you render the essential character of the oak I do not care what peculiar kind of "technique" or

brush work you used. For if I buy your picture I will feel that I have my money's worth in having a living representation of a living thing in nature and be happy in not having been buncoed by your palming off on me a nondescript thing that looks more like an ill-used feather-duster than an oak. That is to say: imitation—not absolute but sufficient—is the fundamental element in all art. Now, to imitate anything we must resort to drawing.

From the standpoint of execution, of the rendering of an idea in a work of art, drawing is of the first importance. But from the standpoint of the function of a work of art, *i. e.*, the stirring of human emotion, it is of less importance than Conception, Composition and Expression. Because the beauty of a work depends upon the elevation of the conception, the beauty of its composition and the profundity of the expression. Nothing is of importance until these three elements have been decided upon. Therefore drawing comes after these in importance as an art power. But then, when the execution of the work begins, drawing becomes of the first importance. This is what many "color cranks" deny.

An artist, speaking of another artist, who is known as a "colorist" of the "Impressionistic" school, said: "It does

look as though some day the esteemed and sincerely sympathetic layman may reach the other, more delectable, point of view; that realm of enchantment, where all other delights in painting fade away, and one at last realizes that COLOR—is the all in all, the Alpha and Omega of art." Nothing more fatuous than this statement.

In opposition to this the eminent French writer Charles Blanc, said: "Drawing is superior to color—because with drawing we can express, without color, all our thought." The proposition is so self-evident that it is amazing that any man who has given the question any study should doubt it for a moment. And Ingres was entirely correct when he said: "*Le Dessin c'est la probité de l'art*": "Drawing is the integrity of art." Because without correct drawing it is impossible to express anything in art—



FIG. 1. "HEAD OF ANGEL" BY MELOZZO DA FORLÌ

be it movement in a body or emotion on a face or expression in a hand.

There is no thought or idea that cannot be expressed in black and white with a lead-pencil. The addition of color is absolutely unessential. Though of course it is an additional beauty. Hence the talk of the superiority of color over drawing is childish.

There are, in painting, two ways of drawing: *First*, to make an outline drawing, and then fill in the outline with paint. This was the usual way of drawing followed by the early Italian masters—

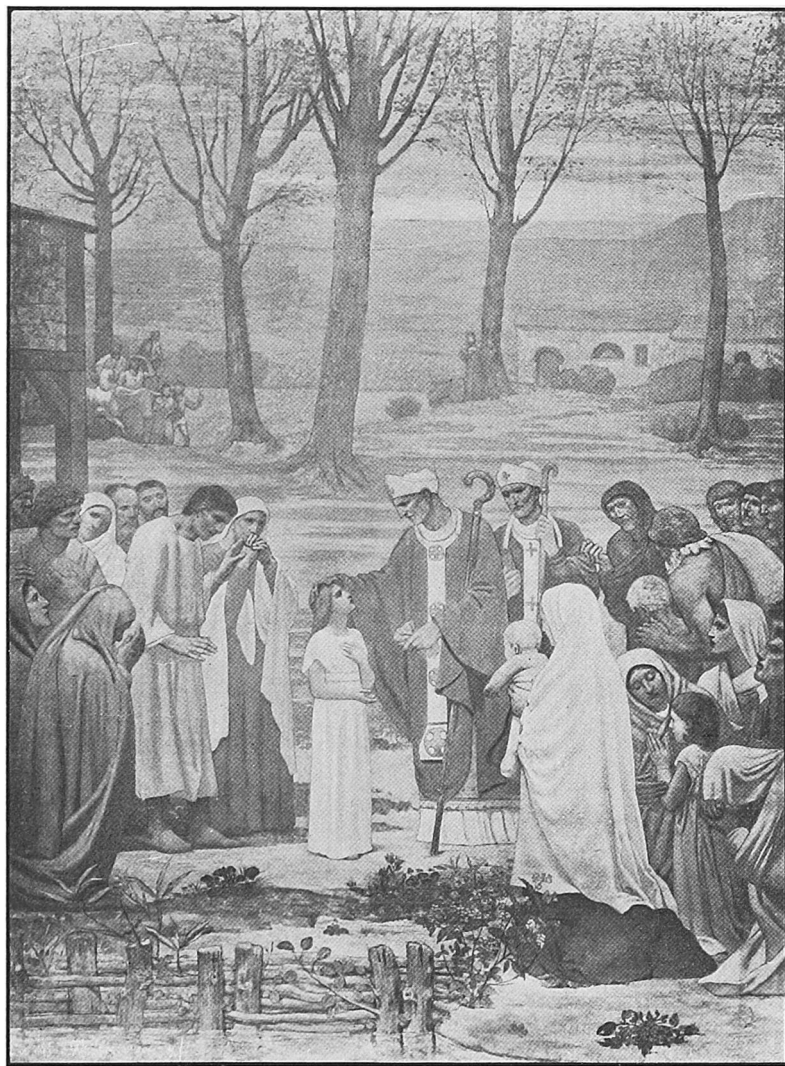


FIG. 2. "ST. DENIS BLESSING ST. GENEVIEVE" BY PUVION DE CHAVANNES

Cimabué, Giotto, etc. We see an example of this in a head by Melozzo da Forlì (Fig. 1). Notice the encircling line about the head of the Angel. This has the effect of holding the mind from quickly going around and back of the form. It is unnatural because we do not see that in nature. But Melozzo's way of drawing was the way in which the early, incomplete artists would naturally draw, because we love to make lines of limitation, maps of things; we seek definitions and precision. Hence we do admire, at least momentarily, all excellent and precise imitation. But artists discovered later that precise limitations could be obtained without hard outline drawing.

There are, generally speaking, three different ways of making a line:—*First*, over-detailed and finicky; *second*, over-simple and blocky; *third*, broad and rational—in which details are subordinated to the ensemble as the general character of the work may demand. For instance, such a beautiful little figure as Bouguereau's "Cupid Captive" (see page 132) requires correct drawing of the whole body with exquisite details; while a large fresco by Michelangelo like his "Creation" (see Fig. 4, page 136) requires a kind of drawing in which details are subordinate to the large silhouette. The main thing in either case is that the drawing should be of such a character that it will not attract special attention to itself. This is done by exactitude of drawing—not mechanical drawing—first of the whole figure and then of the details.

As I said before, while there are lines in nature we see but few, and what we call lines are, generally, only the contours of objects or the limits between spots of color. But nature seems to hate straight lines, nearly as much as she does a vacuum, always seeking the curve. So we see few straight lines in nature and when we do, we see them broken. Examine the edge of a razor with a microscope and you will find the line like a saw's teeth—broken. The straight lines of a pine-tree's trunk are broken by the projecting branches. Therefore we do not see rigid, sharp lines in nature—all is softened. We see sharp edges only in things mechanically made by man. Hence in all art too many straight lines and too much sharpness of line should be avoided by unnoticeably breaking the lines; if this is not done, then lines will become more hard and insistent than in nature, and so attract too much attention to themselves as lines. Per contra, if the line is broken awkwardly or carelessly or coarsely, so that we notice the breaking, that again attracts attention to itself and so, again, is bad.

For example, some of the drawing in de Chavannes's fresco in the Panthéon at Paris, notably the boots of the peasant to the left (see Fig. 2), these forms are so blocky or woodeny that they look as if they had been hewn with an axe. This kind of drawing is a blemish on a masterpiece of figure and color composition. Why he, who had so finely drawn his figures in his splendid decorations "Peace" and "War" at Amiens, should draw this one in so "primitive" a manner is a mystery.

If now you examine Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" (see Fig. 3) you will find drawing that harmonizes with the subject and that does not draw attention to itself by any peculiarity.

In a painting we should scarcely be aware that a figure is drawn at all. It should rather appear to have been simply colored, so that instead of the

mind being hemmed in by a confining line it should play over the surface and easily *slip around the form*. That is the best kind of drawing, because it aids instead of hindering the effective expression of the main idea of the work. Such drawing as this is so difficult that few men master it completely. Most of the drawing of even some of the greatest colorists is defective, either in the general outline or in details. I can pick out such faults in the works of Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian. Therefore because drawing is so difficult, many artists—because impatient of reaching their effects in the expression of ideas—slur their drawing and pay more attention to color. Drawing has thus gradually come to be looked upon by many cheap artists as of secondary importance. This is all upside down.

All men love correct drawing. This love is based on two foundation faculties of the soul love of imitation and of precision. Not only does the child grow by imitating its parents and fellows, but it spends much surplus energy in a lively admiration for anything well-imitated, and things can only be imitated by drawing them. After imitation we love precision. Moreover the precision, the clearness, hence obviousness of all the forms of Classic art is the very cause of its triumph across so many centuries. Says Ruskin: "Speaking with strict propriety, therefore, we should call a man a great painter only as he excels in *precision* and force, in the language of lines, and a great versifier is he who excels in precision and force in the language of words."

But while we admire closely imitated things, we do not love them for long unless they also radiate poetry; because they lack that kind of mystery which we actually do like, which is needful in great art and which we may call—transparent mystery or obvious mystery. We like this transparent mystery very much, as we do the silver light of the moon or the incense-laden light of a cathedral, through which we can see and beneath which we know are forms of precision. We love these half-mysteries because they create in us states of revery, in which we easily stray off into dreamland and the faraway castles in Spain, there to find rest and recreation; but above all because these half-mysteries suggest to us the larger mysteries of the Universe into which we are fascinated to project ourselves, to be cradled on the infinite deeps of Space and Time—the most alluring mysteries of all.

But we never for a moment forget the need of the strength and force underlying all precision, which always appears to us as a manifestation of

intellectual power. That is why we love a fine piece of cabinet work, an exquisite Japanese lacquer box or a Parthenon, in which the lines and joints and edges are so fine and sharp and precise as to rouse us to marvel how men could possibly work with such wonderful precision. Most of our enjoyment of painting—as mere painting—depends on our love of precision. Take Whistler's paintings as an example. Since most of them have little beauty of composition, their chief charm is precision of values. To produce his "tone-harmonies"



FIG. 3. "THE SISTINE MADONNA" BY RAPHAEL

or values required rare precision of eye and hand.

I believe Velasquez was the greatest truthful "painter" of the single figure, that the world ever saw—from the standpoint of realism. His figures seem to live and move even though shown standing still. How did he do that—by color? No! It was by drawing. For Velasquez drawing was of the first importance. Says Beruette, a Spanish artist whose book on "Velasquez" had the honor of a laudatory preface by Bonnat, the French painter: "The 'Water Seller of Seville,' the 'Buffoons,' and the 'Tramps' which he painted reveal a tendency towards the analogous processes of the classic idealization, they

reveal the tendency of the master, aiming to lift himself from the realistic interpretation of individuals, to the expression of the characteristics of the species or types. Velasquez would not have been able to reach so high a point of idealization if he had not been such an accomplished *draftsman*. That is his most salient faculty. We have already made the remark in the presence of every one of his masterpieces—his drawing is always irreproachable. And this quality which is so difficult and takes so long to acquire, was, so to speak, innate with him." And again: "What is it, therefore, that constitutes the essence of his genius? It is, first of all, the constant perfection of his drawing." Velasquez was not a great "colorist." Says Beruette: "We cannot include Velasquez among the great colorists, in the strict sense of the world. An

If we reflect upon the foregoing, especially after a long study of his works in the Prado Museum at Madrid, we will conclude that the reason why Velasquez was not exuberant in color, like Rubens and some great Italian artists, was because he had discovered that he did not have the power to handle the riotous color-schemes of Titian, Raphael, Giorgione and at the same time obtain his exactitude of values. As he sought truth, reality rather than poetry, he never succeeded in any of his religious pictures except in his "The Crucifixion," a single figure. As complexity of composition of line and of color-scheme is an obstacle to getting exactitude of Values and of Drawing, he reduced his palette to the utmost simplicity and sacrificed brilliance of color to drawing.

But while his work is wonderful from the point

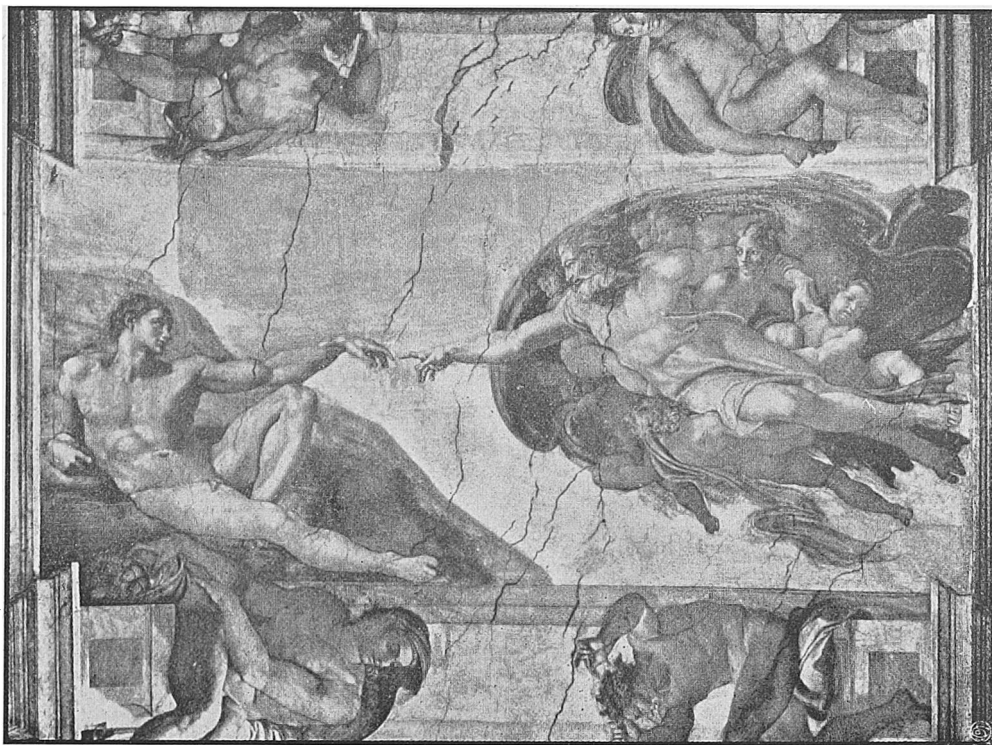


FIG. 4. "CREATION OF ADAM" SISTINE CHAPEL BY MICHELANGELO

eminent Spanish critic Sanchez has said: "Velasquez would be very much less great than he is in reality if he had the color of Rubens. The color of Rubens is conventional and the main characteristic of Velasquez, that which constitutes the essence of his genius, that by which he is superior to all other painters, is his sincerity. This remark might be applied to the color of other masters beside Rubens who shine by the brilliance and intensity of their color. Velasquez never had an exuberant palette; he employed only the colors needed to obtain those graduated tones where are combined all those shades of gray. And thus he arrived, thanks to the finesse with which he established the relation between the different values, at harmonies of a supreme distinction. It is on account of this quality rather than on account of his famous 'naturalism' that Velasquez must to-day be regarded as the most original of painters; it is this quality which gives him his great influence over contemporary art."

of view of exactness, it is often unbeautiful from the non-painter's point of view. The Salon Carré in the Louvre sings with color, the main gallery in the Pitti Palace and the Tribuna of the Uffizi in Florence are veritable oratorios of color, warm, stimulating and lifting in power, while the great Velasquez gallery in the Prado of Madrid is a somewhat cold collection of wonderful grays. But after some days of admiration by the intellect, these leave the soul cold, unmoved and even depressed. Therefore, take from Velasquez's work his marvelous drawing—his works will fall to a second place in short order.

Per contra, what keeps Delacroix's fresco of "Apollo" in the Louvre from being in the highest class of art? Its weakness of drawing. Had Velasquez or Tiepolo drawn the figures, it would be one of the world's greatest masterpiece of decoration. This weakness of drawing is noticeable in nearly all of Delacroix's works. It is the one blight upon it. But it is enough to have kept him out of the highest class of artists. And I can understand Max

Nordau when he says: "I am afraid I must likewise be guilty of heresy in respect to another great man; but Delacroix, too, fails to justify the idolatry people have displayed and to some extent still display towards him. I do not misjudge his joyous colorature, although his harmonies are rather loud than grand. I am not blind to the characteristic Mobility of his composition, although it is generally far more a stagy flourish than assertion of strength in the service of a will conscious of what it is aiming at. What excites in me, however, unconquerable opposition, is his phrasing."

When one examines the drawing in Delacroix's work one sees the force of Maxime du Camp's remarks: "Like certain literary men who created Art for Art's sake, Delacroix has created — Color for Color's sake." As to this Edmond About said: "It is very true that Delacroix does not draw as correctly as Flandrin or Lehmann and that he could not win even an honorable mention in the class of Ingres, and he is perfectly consoled about it." The result is that his drawing was often so faulty that these faults draw our attention away from his color, on which he wanted to focus our attention, while on the contrary Velasquez's drawing was so perfect that it does not at all draw our attention to it—as drawing. His figures do not seem to be drawn and so we are free to focus our mind quickly on his modeling, color and expression. Therefore most of Delacroix's works save his "Dante and Virgil," the first work he ever exhibited, move us only superficially and for a short time.

During the lifetime of Delacroix many of his partisan "romantic" admirers criticised Ingres for his devotion to Line. One of them, Théophile Gautier, said: "The début of art is a lie; for in Nature there are no lines." These critics contrasted Delacroix with Ingres to the belittling of the latter, and apotheosized color at the expense of drawing. The result was the starting of a schism in the French art world which, widening more and more from 1830 onward, finally divided the artists of France and of the world into two camps—those who think drawing is more important than color and others who think color is more important than drawing. But since the "color school" has finally

fallen into all sorts of appalling excesses, as manifested by the various "isms" from Impressionism to Futurism, the world is commencing to take the common-sense view—that both fine drawing and fine color are indispensable in a great work of art, and that if there is any superiority at all, it is on the side of drawing.

Exactitude of drawing is essential in all art, whether the work be only representative or expressive. But everything is relative. In mere representative art, such as the portrait of a man, exactitude of drawing is far more essential than in a work showing a man in action. If a man standing still is not drawn with exactness, he will look stiff and wooden.

But as soon as it comes to drawing a figure in motion the exactitude must be only relative; it need not, in fact cannot, be as exact as in a figure not in motion. If you study closely the works of Velasquez, you will find that he modified his drawing in much of his work—when the figure was in motion. To give the feeling of motion, it is necessary to depart from the actual exactitude of nature.

But it must be remembered that mere exactness of drawing is not the highest possible aim in art. The greatest artists of the world

often took slight liberties with both drawing and color. That Michelangelo could draw in a wonderful way is proven by his "pieta," his first important work. But that he did not always draw with that same exactitude is evident in all his works. His drawing was relatively correct. The result is that while his drawing, as in his "Sistine" decorations, is not always exact, it is better than exact—it is grand! And by his *slight* and reasoned-out departure from exact nature he expressed something higher than mere exactness—power, motion, sublimity. But his departure from exactness of drawing was never sufficient to be easily noticeable on first view.

The difficulty of good drawing and the proof of its supreme importance, is again exemplified by Sculpture. What makes the difficulty of sculpture?—the drawing! In sculpture the drawing of a figure, so that it looks *supple* and *true in its movement* from all sides, giving the feeling of life as if the figure could walk, is so enormously difficult, that



FIG. 5. "MADONNA" BY VAN EYCK

there are ten pieces of first class figure work in painting to one in sculpture.

An interesting remark was made by the late Sir Purdon Clarke, the director of the Metropolitan Museum: "But this fad of the men who paint with the long-handled brushes, and pretend to represent the vibration of light, I believe is passing; and the artists who can draw will again be recognized as the real artists, as they are. Does it ever occur to you that, aside from his color, the accuracy of Turner's drawing was marvelous? You can find the record of a variation of $\frac{1}{4}$ thousandth of an inch that he has made in a line, to give the effect he wanted."

Even a peasant knows by intuition whether any familiar object or human body is properly drawn or not—as to movement and proportion. He does not know always when the form, as drawn, is vulgar. But when you place before him a refined drawing of a figure by the side of that of another which is vulgarly drawn, he will *feel* the difference at once by instinct. Because our whole mental and spiritual structure is shaped by the nature of lines, contours and patterns of lines formed by the objects in nature, not by their color, for the lines are relatively permanent while color is evanescent. When the sun shines the line-patterns of a sublime cathedral will be practically the same as when the sun is obscured. But the color will be absolutely different. Hence the power of color to effect our nervous systems is far less potent than is the power of lines and contours.

We are held captive by the line-patterns of things. The reason is simple. It is because our eyes—and therefore our minds and souls, are forced, willy-nilly, to follow these lines which *jostle, cradle or lift* us—amuse, delight or exalt us—according as the lines are angular, serpentine or pyramidal, as I explained fully in my chapter on: "The Essence of All Beauty" in the November issue of this magazine; and, in the case of the cathedral, it would make no difference whether it be of white, gray or pink stone.

Quitting sublime things: we prefer and buy certain mahogany chairs rather than others not because of the color—that being the same—but because of the superior grace of their lines and contours.

It is astonishing that our biologists, our psychologists and moralists have not seen the importance of this matter in their pondering over the question of the goal toward which they should lead mankind. But it is of great importance to the business men of New York to know—that New York is, now monumental and sublime, hence alluring, to mankind—when approached from the Bay, because of its pyramidal, monumental skyline; that Central Park, on account of the graceful lines, patterns and contours of its trees, roads and rocks is the finest city park in the world; and that the abominable mass of weird and grotesque electric signs on Broadway, made disheartening and aberrating by the shockingly angular and disorderly ugliness of their lines and patterns and of their rat-trap frame works, make of that street one of the most hideous and irritating avenues on the face of the globe, wearying the nervous system, dulling and debasing the minds and souls of all of us, young and old, and thus engendering a subtle tendency

towards rebellion and ending in vice and crime, in ways that could easily be pointed out, and costly alike to the individual and the State.

To conclude: It is certain that Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" gives to the soul of every man of culture a spiritual lift, be he a Christian, a Mohammedan or a Hindoo—not because of its religious significance but because of its monumental, lifting, spiritual pattern of lines; and it makes no difference whether that pattern of lines be filled with gray, red or blue color or by the varied colors of Raphael. And it is certain that the "Madonna" of Van Eyck (see Fig. 5) does not give us the same amount of spiritual lift, even though more exquisite and rich in color than Raphael's "Madonna," simply because its lines are less monumental, hence less spiritual and lifting.

Therefore since we are thus dominated by the lines, contours and patterns of objects in nature, when we see any figure in any picture drawn in a glaringly incorrect manner both as to movement and proportion; or if the manner of the drawing shows vulgar forms (the vulgarity and unbeautiful commonplaceness of it we recognize by instinct) it shocks us if we are refined. And in art every question-raising shock holds the attention of our questioning mind and this is an inhibition of the stirring of the emotions of our soul and so defeats the fundamental purpose which must be at the basis of all great art, *i. e.*, to stir the emotions of mankind; and great art is the only kind we are now considering in these pages.

In other words: drawing must not only be relatively correct as to movement and proportion of arms, legs and body but it must also be refined and show beauty of form, which depends upon the subtle drawing of the form.

Therefore when the reader faces a picture or statue with the intention of judging it, let him first see if the objects represented—men, animals or things—are drawn with relative correctness. If they are drawn with noticeable incorrectness or ugly deformation of the form, no matter how charming their color may be, or who might be the author, they can at once be taken out of the category of great art such as can alone hope to endure. I repeat: we so love human efficiency, hence precision of workmanship, hence good drawing, that no matter how charming at first view the color of a picture may be, we gradually lose respect for it as we discover its incompetent drawing, until it finally irritates us and we push it aside for art that is better drawn, at the same time well colored, and so has a chance to endure in our esteem. What is true of a picture is true of a statue. And the same law holds good in all the arts.

As for the technical talk, about one secondary phase or another, of drawing, which can hardly interest a layman very much, that can be found in text-books. For his purpose, *i. e.*, of estimating the value of a work of art, technically, all he need to know is that as between drawing and color drawing is of the first importance; and that that is the best drawing which does not seem to be drawn at all and, so, does not attract attention to itself, by any tricks of the artist, of any epoch, or of any school.

F. W. Ruckstuhl